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Ṣirāṭ Link

A path for connecting with Allah, others, and one's self

Faith

Why do we pray?
Analysis by Rumina Hassan

From Prisoner to Preacher
Shaykh Mateen Charbonneau's journey

Islam:
How it all Started

Letter from MOULANA ABIDI

Salāmun ʿAlaykum,

May Allah bless you and your family. I extend my *tabrīkāt* (blessings), *taḥiyyāt* (glad tidings), and *duʿā* (prayers) to all the Muslims around the world on the arrival of the spiritual season, the blessed months of Rajab, Shaʿbān, and Ramaḍān.

As the spring season marks the regrowth of the plants, the month of Rajab marks the renewal of a person's soul and quest for union with Allah. In this sense, Rajab is the month of reseeding our faith and relationship with Allah. We nourish this seed with spiritual water and sun through various recommended ritual practices, such as fasting, and by following the example of the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) and his Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa). This seed eventually grows into a plant during the month of Shaʿbān. In this month, we continue to grow the plant by nourishing the soul with proper akhlāq and observing our duties towards Allah. In the month of Ramaḍān, Allah invites us to be His guests, and metaphorically speaking, witness the efforts of our previous months come to fruition.

In this issue we focus on faith and the beginning so we can build through the month of Rajab and Inshāʾ Allāh nourish and reseed our faith. Why do we do this? Faith is something that needs to grow and we need to strengthen it. We need to have knowledge so we can implement it into doing good deeds. It is then when we are tested with hardship, our faith is strong enough to help us overcome it and becomes even more strengthened. Many times in this life we will be tested and those tests will help fortify our faith. We have to have hope and understand that these hardships are the ones that will push us to be the best Muslims we can be. When we go back to the basics, like our main Uṣūl ad-Dīn (roots of religion) and Furūʿ ad-Dīn (branches of religion), we will come out stronger on the other side of hardship.

In today's world we often see that when one hardship arises, we are quick to be upset and focus on the negative of it. We have to re-enforce the core of our beliefs to have a foundation so strong that no hardship will shake us. We have to look at this *dunyā* (world) as a test and these hardships are opportunities to strengthen your faith.

Let us therefore take advantage of this beautiful month of Rajab. Let us grow this seed of faith by following the example of the Noble Prophet (ṣ) and his Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa) and serving the oppressed of the world through prayer and good deeds. By following the right role models and serving Allah's creatures all around the earth, inshāʾ Allāh we become closer to Him.

With Duʿās,

Nabi R. Mir (Abidi)

Ṣirāṭ Link

A 2nd Chance Books Publication

وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا

For the love of Him, they feed the needy, the orphan, and the prisoner.

(Noble Qurʾān 76:8)

2nd Chance Books is a vnon-profit organization that was founded in order to assist incarcerated Muslims by providing them with educational materials, a support system, and tools for rehabilitation. These two go hand in hand to answer their numerous questions about Islam, acheiving a more thorough understanding of the religion. So far, they have distributed over 10,000 books to inmates across the country.

Among 2nd Chance's most recent initiatives is *Ṣirāṭ Link*, a quarterly magazine. The title *Ṣirāṭ Link* is inspired by the Arabic term *Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, which means the right path. Therefore, we pray that this magazine is a means of guidance to the right path and a connection to Allah, the broader community, and oneself. Inshāʾ Allāh it can serve as an opportunity for growing one's faith through education.

This magazine will be under the guidance and oversight of Moulana Nabi Raza Mir Abidi, Resident ʿĀlim of SABA Center, and several other scholars and experts.

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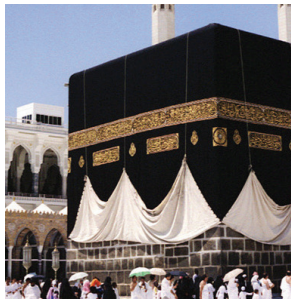


The Secret of Relying on Allah

Trials and tribulations have the potential to polish our personalities. When we go through adversity, we can either respond positively to overcome the adversity and pass the test–or we can shrink from the situation and fail. When we are able to successfully overcome a trial, we learn something about ourselves and our own willpower. We now have strengthened mental and spiritual tools to overcome future struggles that we will encounter.

It is somewhat similar to the bench press in the gym. We may start off just lifting the bar, but we continue to add weight the more we go to the gym to develop strength and muscle. We are creating a test for ourselves to develop physical strength and bulk.

The same tenacity that we bring to the gym to overcome last month's max weight, we need to bring to life to develop the tools to overcome the resistance and tests we encounter in life. Allah gives us the tests to develop our spiritual tools so that we can enter heaven. As Allah says in the Noble Qur'ān:

"We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient." (2:155)

When we are being tested, we should call out to Allah and pray to Him with sincerity. However, Allah warns us not to call on Him when we are in desperation, we should call out to Him in ease as well. He doesn't want us to be like when Atheists call out to God when they are near death. The Qur'ān illustrates this mindset in Sūrah Yūnus (Jonah):

"It is He who carries you across land and sea. When you are in the ships, and they sail with them with a favourable wind, rejoicing in it, there comes upon them a tempestuous wind and waves assail them from every side, and they think that they are besieged, they invoke Allah putting exclusive faith in Him, 'If You deliver us from this, we will surely be among the grateful.'" (10:22)

So when we pray to Allah to rescue us in difficult times, we should keep that spirit of reliance on Him even after he delivers us from our difficulties, or else we haven't actually recognized how much we rely on Him. We should maintain our prayer and our good actions even in good times–that's how we know we've attained more spiritual strength. Once we do that, then we attain the secret of relying on God: *it is through suffering or difficulties we attain true happiness and prosperity*. As the Qur'ān says:

> "Indeed, ease accompanies hardship."
>
> *(94:5)*

Prayer sets the intention and the spiritual tone. We can strengthen our prayers by additionally seeking intercession through one of the inerrant (Maʿṣūmīn) of the Ahl al-Bayt, as a method that Allah has mentioned in the Qurʾān. As it is said in the Qurʾān:

"We did not send any apostle but to be obeyed by Allah's leave. Had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you and pleaded to Allah for forgiveness, and the Apostle had pleaded for forgiveness for them, they would have surely found Allah all-Clement, all-Merciful." (4:64)

In addition to prayer, we have been taught to take several other steps when trying to overcome a test.

It is reported that Imām ʻAlī (ʿa) said, "The best person whom you can consult is the one with (abundant) experience and the worst person whom you can associate with is the one with (numerous) faults."

When we face a challenge we should turn toward teachers, elders, family, and friends who we can rely upon for advice about how to get through the difficult patch. Our own mind can limit us. We may become overly negative or overly positive. We may not have a creative solution. Asking people with more experience than us can give us new answers and a sense of security and encouragement. Perhaps someone you will consult will offer to help practically solve your problem as well.

"Allah loves the steadfast."

(Noble Qurʾān 3:146)

Still, difficulties can last and come back around. Imagine the stories of the prophets. They were constantly rejected by the people they preached to. They were often mocked, ridiculed, attacked, and some were killed by their people. But, despite the danger and the humiliation, their goal was righteousness; they never backed down. Perseverance (sābr) is the final key to difficulty. As it is taught, Imām ʻAlī (ʿa) said, "Patience is the most helpful thing in (facing the hardships of) one's lifetime."

Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) said:

"Faith and action are two brothers, bound together with a single rope. Allah will not accept either one without the other."

Mizan Al Hikmah

Qunūt Corner

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ ۖ
أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ۖ
فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

Wa idhā saʾalaka ʿibādī ʿannī fa innī qarīb
Ujību daʿwata-d dāʿi idhā daʿān
Falyastajībū lī wa-l yuʾminūbī lʿallahum yarshudūn

"And when My servants ask you about Me, then (say to them that) surely, I am very near; I answer the prayers of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So, they should hear My call, and believe in Me, so that they may be guided"

(Noble Qurʾān 2:186)

This verse tells us how Allah is close to us, and that we should always turn to Him for fulfillment of our needs and wishes. Reciting this duʿā helps us become closer to Allah and have complete trust in Him alone because we know that there will never be a time when we turn to Him, and He turns away from us. Rather, He is eagerly awaiting our duʾās and supplications!

Sūrah al-Fātiḥah

بِسْمِ اللَّـهِ الرَّحْمَـٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿١﴾

Bismillāhir Raḥmānir Raḥīm

I begin, dedicate my action, and seek help with the name of Allah, the Most Kind (general mercy), the Most Merciful (mercy for the believers).

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّـهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾

Alḥamdu lillāhi Rabbi-l ʿĀlamīn

All praise is for Allah, Nurturer of the worlds.

الرَّحْمَـٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٣﴾

Ar-Raḥmānir-Raḥīm

The Most Kind (general mercy), the Most Merciful (mercy for the believers).

مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٤﴾

Māliki Yawmid-Dīn

He is the Owner of the Day of Judgment.

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿٥﴾

Iyyāka naʿbudu wa Iyyāka nastaʿīn

(O Allah), only You we worship, and only You we seek help from.

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٦﴾

Ihdina-ṣ Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm

Keep us on the straight path (and keep guiding us).

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ

Ṣirāṭ al-ladhīna anʿamta ʿalayhim

The path of those whom You have given Your blessings (like the Prophets, Imams and Shuhadah),

غَيْرِالْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

ghayri-l maghḍūbi ʿalayhim wa laḍ-ḍāllīn

not those who are on the wrong path and have gone astray.

Why do We Pray?

One of the most asked questions within our community today is, "Why do we have to pray?" When people ask, I only respond, "Do you not find it worthy to thank Him, the One who has given you everything, and the One Who can take all that away from you if He so wishes overnight?"

In understanding why we pray, there are several factors that need to be understood first, before coming to the essence of prayer itself. The first is understanding and believing that there is a Hereafter, a life after death, one more permanent and just by the grace of Allah. For all the injustices and crimes caused in this world, there must be a time of exposing the truth. In accepting the faith of Islam, we have accepted that there will be a Hereafter, and that this world is only transitory.

So knowing that, we also understand that we must send our deeds forth, to serve as a light and support on the Day of Reckoning, where we will be held accountable for all that we have done in this world. We know that everything we do here will either form benefits or punishment in the afterlife. It is all about prioritizing and being prepared.

Allah does not need our prayers, so the question of prayer still remains. But if only we understood that the power of prayer is such that, though we gift it to Allah, for all His Mercy and Blessings, He gifts it back, allowing it to serve as the beacon guiding us on that Day when no wealth, money, or children, will stand beside us.

In this world, we openly believe in the moral values of thanking someone when they do us a favor or help us in some way. So why is it one rule for the people and another rule for the Supreme Power? Is it not Him we are answerable to? Yet we tend to care what people think of us more.

So if we accept our morals and values, and the basic service to humanity, then we must also accept that we have to thank Allah for the gift of breathing, talking, and walking. We must thank Him for every ability we have–because we know and are fully aware, that all of it can be taken from us in a matter of seconds. And what better way to thank Him than the form of prayer?

In making it mandatory, Allah has only done us a favor, so that we may continue adding to our good deeds, as remembering Him is a mercy in itself and also rewarding for us.

As we stand at the designated time in front of our Lord and raise our hands to attest that God is truly great, we affirm our acknowledgement of His supremacy, His bounties, and His power. What better way to thank He who created us and gave us everything?

In our busy lives with our never-ending agendas, it is nothing short of beneficial for us to stop everything we are doing at that precise moment in time when the call of Ibrahim is echoed throughout the world, and praise Him Who gave us the ability to wake up that morning, and He who granted us the honor of being raised in a religion that promotes direct communication with the Creator.

Thank Him, because thanking Him through compulsory prayer five times a day is sowing the seeds of reward that we will reap on that Day when none other than our deeds shall come to our aid.

Daily Dhikr

There is a short dhikr associated with each day. It is recommended to recite the daily dhikr 100 times on that day.

SATURDAY

يَا رَبَّ الْعَالَمِين

Yā Rabba-l ʿĀlamīn
O Lord of the worlds!

SUNDAY

يَا ذَا الْجَلَالِ وَ الْإِكْرَام

Yā Dha-l Jalāli wa-l Ikrām
O Owner of majesty and honor!

MONDAY

يَا قَاضِيَ الْحَاجَات

Yā Qāḍiyya-l Ḥājāt
O Granter of wishes!

TUESDAY

يَا اَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِين

Yā Arḥama-r Rāḥimīn
O the Most Merciful of the Merciful!

WEDNESDAY

يَا حَيُّ يَا قَيُّوم

Yā Ḥayyu Yā Qayyūm
O the Living, O the Self-subsisting!

THURSDAY

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللهُ الْمَلِكَ الْحَقُّ الْمُبِين

Lā Ilāha illa-llahu-l Malika-l Ḥaqqu-l Mubīn
There is no god except Allah, the Master of the clear truth

FRIDAY

اَللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

Allāhumma ṣalli ʿalā Muḥammadi-w wa Āli Muḥammad
O Allah, send blessings upon Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad

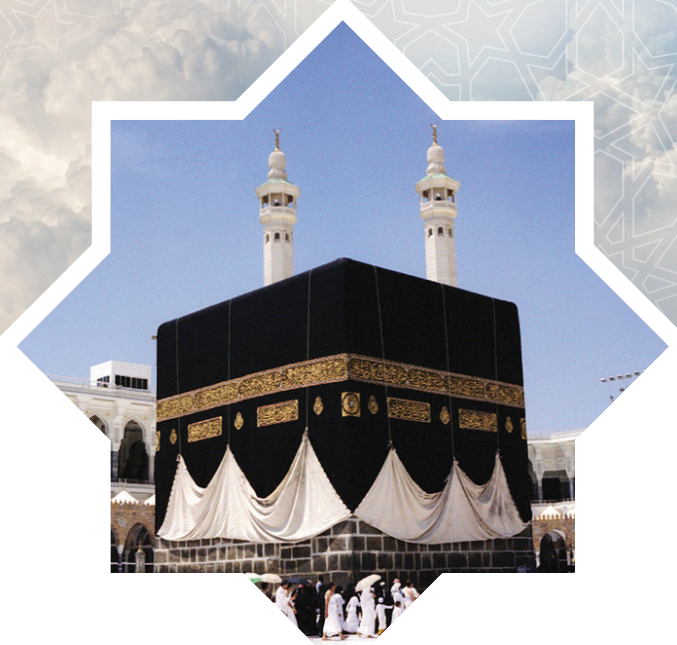
Pieces of Paradise in this World

Imām ʿAlī (ʿa) said:

There are four pieces of paradise in this world; Masjid al-Ḥarām, Masjid an-Nabī (peace and blessings be upon him and his household), Masjid al-ʿAqṣā, and Masjid al-Kūfah.

Masjid Al-ʿAqṣā

Masjid Al-ʿAqṣā is located in Jerusalem, Palestine. It is a place of great historical significance, dating back to the time of Prophet Ibrāhīm (ʿa). Prophet Muḥammad's (ṣ) famous night journey, the miʿrāj (ascension), to Allah took place from the Kaʿbah in Mecca to Masjid al-ʿAqṣā. He then ascended to the heavens from Masjid al-ʿAqṣā.



Masjid al-Ḥarām

Mecca, without a doubt, is the most important place in every Muslim's heart around the world. Mecca holds the house of Allah that Prophet Ibrāhīm (ʿa) built, the holy Kaʿbah. It is the direction upon which Muslims turn to pray towards every day. Today, we witness millions of visitors every single year during the annual Ḥajj pilgrimage.

"A believer in the masjid is like a fish in water."

(Fayḍ al-Ilah, P. 50)

Masjid an-Nabawī

Madīnah is the city of the seal of the prophets, Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ), Allah's last messenger. It was where he relocated to when establishing Islam and was his final resting spot. He is buried in Masjid an-Nabawī.

Masjid al-Kūfah

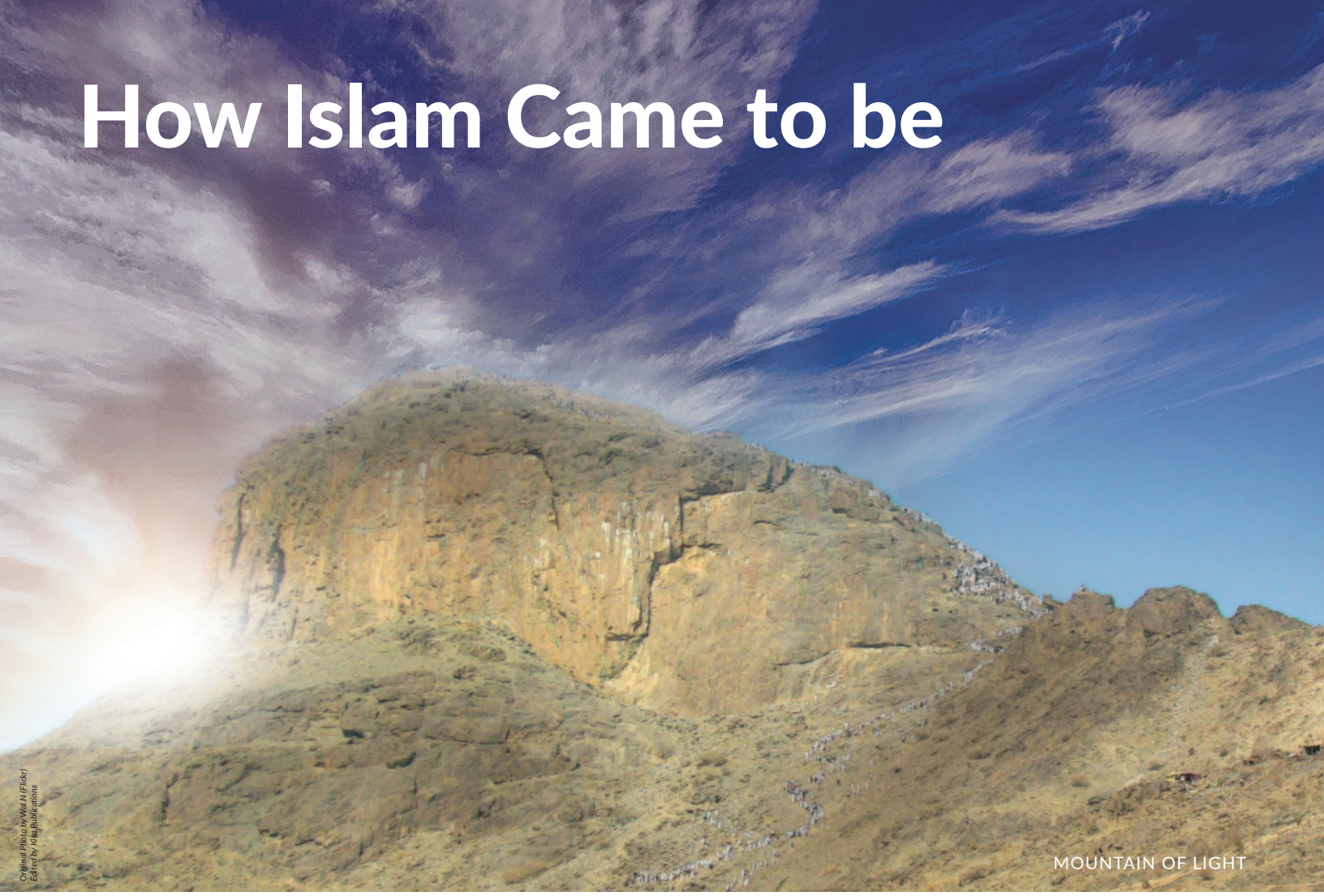
Kūfah is considered another holy piece of paradise on Earth. It holds the iconic Masjid al-Kūfah in which Imām ʿAlī (ʿa) used to speak from the pulpit and where many important historical incidents took place. It is also where Imām ʿAlī (ʿa) was martyred and will be the eventual governing place of Imām al-Mahdī (ʿaj).

Ābān ibn Taqlab narrates:
One day, Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq (ʿa) offered a two rakaʿāt prayer behind the gated walls of Kūfah and then said, "This is the spot of al-Qāʾim's* (ʿaj) home."

Muntakhab al-Athar, P. 488

*the one who rises, referring to a title of Imām al-Mahdī

How Islam Came to be



Original Photo by Wei N (Flickr)
Edited by Kisa Publications

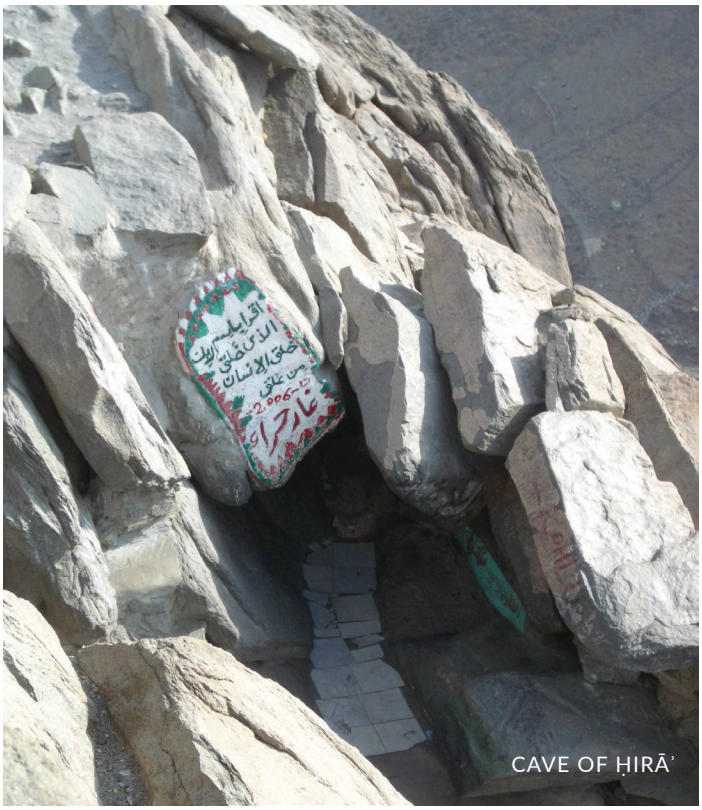
The story of Islam begins long before the first revelation of the Holy Qurʾān by the Angel Jabraʾīl (Gabriel) to Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) in the cave of Hirāʾ. In fact, it begins with his birth. Prophet Muḥammad was special– after all, he was sent as a mercy to humanity. Allah saw the potential in Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) upon his creation, making him worthy to be a guide to mankind. However, to be appointed a prophet does not mean it came without its challenges. His great status of prophethood would guarantee that he would have many responsibilities, tests, and difficulties. It is not such that anyone could rise to a high position in society without struggle.

His struggles began before birth. Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) was orphaned several times in his early life. Prior to his birth, his father ʿAbdullāh passed away. His mother, Āminah, passed away when he was just five years old, and his grandfather, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, who was his caretaker after his mother, also passed away soon after. His uncle, Abū Ṭālib, then took over his care. Needless to say, he was not untouched by tragedy. These experiences, and specifically how he handled them, would shape him to be the noble and honest man he grew to be.

Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ), grew up to be well respected by the Meccans for his wisdom and virtues. He was known as al-Amīn amongst the people, a trusted and truthful person. However, the society he lived in was full of evil, ignorance, and oppressive cultural traditions. Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) would go to the Cave of Ḥirāʾ (Mount Ḥirāʾ), a mountain near Mecca, where he would meditate and worship Allah.

He would spend days in that cave, just praying to Allah asking for guidance for the people of his society that were lost and in dire need of it. His society was such that even with the brightness of the sun over the desert, it was devoid of any light. His heart yearned for the guidance of Allah.

A day came when not only the history of the world changed, but Prophet Muḥammad's life and society as well. The day came for the start of Islam. After spending his entire life in Mecca with the polytheists, Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) was 40 years old when he received his first revelation, officially making him the final Prophet and Messenger of Allah. It happened in the cave of Ḥirāʾ, where he was focused on praying to Allah, when suddenly, the Angel Jabraʾīl (Gabriel) appeared with what we know as the first verses of the Noble Qurʾān:



CAVE OF ḤIRĀʾ

"Recite in the name of your Lord Who created. Created man from a clot. Recite and your Lord is most Generous. Who taught (to write) with the pen. Taught man what he knew not." (96:1-5)

With these verses, it was decided now, both formally and publicly, that Almighty Allah had chosen Muḥammad (ṣ) to be the last and final messenger to humankind. His heart was full of joy as he thanked Allah for giving him this responsibility. He quickly went home to tell his beloved wife Lady Khadījah (ʿa) to share the truth and invite her toward the *ḥaqq* (truth). His wife was already a pious and God-conscious woman, so it is no surprise that Khadījah immediately believed in the Prophethood and affirmed her faith in Islam, along with Prophet Muḥammad's cousin, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (ʿa). They were the first male and female to accept Islam. This was the start of a divine mission that was meant to cleanse the Arabian Peninsula of polytheism. It began in the home of Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ), then spread to a smaller group of people, and over time, we have seen the progression and growth of Islam.

They found justice in Islam

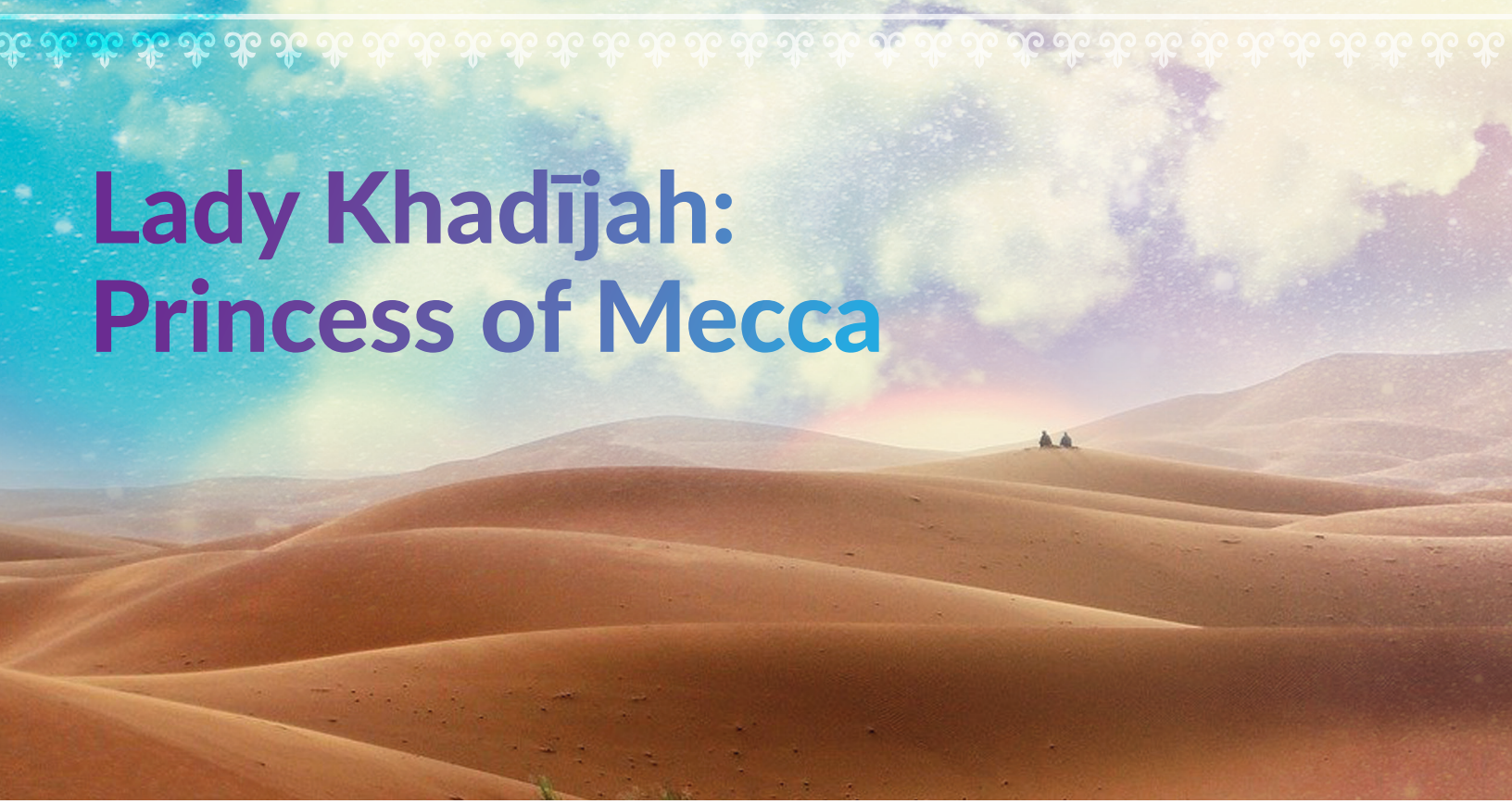
The announcement of Prophethood was full of different reactions in the Meccan society. The oppressed classes flocked towards Islam, seeing it as the answer to their prayers. In Islam, they found an equalizer – it did not matter their wealth, or lack thereof, their skin color, or what tribe they came from. They found justice in Islam, when there was none to be found in their society. It was through these lower socioeconomic classes that Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) began to build a strong community, not with wealth, but with human capital.

Allah says in the Noble Qurʾān, "Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-conscious among you." (49:13)

> Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) began to build a strong community, not with wealth, but with human capital.

However, this faith was a threat to the oligarchy – and its upper class members openly mocked the Prophet (ṣ). They were in desperation to stop the final revelation, for it rallied against all of their wrong practices of racism, classism, sexism, and much more.

Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) continued to lay the foundation for the growth of Islam for the next 23 years of his lifetime, which was continued with the Divine appointment of the Maʿṣūmīn (Imāms) following his demise.



Lady Khadījah: Princess of Mecca

Khadījah bint Khuwaylid (ʿa) was born in the year 68 before Hijra (555 AD) and died in the year 3 AH (620 AD) in Mecca, modern day Saudi Arabia. She was the first wife of the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) and the first female to accept Islam. She was also the mother of the Prophet's (ṣ) only daughter and living child, Fāṭimah az-Zahrāʾ (ʿa).

Lady Khadījah's father was Khuwaylid b. Asad, a leading member of the Quraysh tribe and a successful merchant. Her mother's name was Fāṭimah bint Zāʾidah.

Given that Lady Khadījah had come from a family of merchants, she had inevitably learned the trade quite well from her family and became a successful merchant herself. More importantly, Lady Khadījah was also a *ḥanīf*, meaning that she was a monotheist who followed Prophet Ibrāhīm (ʿa), but was not part of the Jewish or Christian communities. This was quite significant given that Mecca was almost entirely polytheist at that time.

Lady Khadījah's religious convictions directly affected how she conducted her business and how she spent her wealth. In trade, she was always recognized as being honest, truthful and fair in her dealings. Her reliability and overall ethical conduct as a merchant attracted a lot of business to her and made her wealthy. Despite her wealth, she was extremely generous. She spent a substantial amount of her wealth feeding and clothing the poor and even going as far as paying for the marriage expenses of her poor relatives. Because of her magnanimity, she was known as *Khadījah al-Kubrā* (Khadījah the Great).

Out of religious modesty, as well as for safety reasons, Lady Khadījah employed men to carry out trade on her behalf. It is said that often enough, many of these employed men were not reliable, as they often cheated in their deals to enrich themselves. This type of behavior is something she disliked very much.

By the grace of Allah, Lady Khadījah hired the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) to a trade commission to Syria. Having been satisfied with his character, she hired him some more. The Prophet's reputation as an honest and trustworthy merchant gained him the title of *al-Amīn*, "the Trustworthy."

His growing reputation as a truthful merchant (a rarity in Arabia at that time), as well as his ability to increase profits beyond what Khadījah expected, impressed her a great deal. Given his own magnanimous and honest character, Lady Khadījah proposed marriage to him through an acquaintance. The Prophet (ṣ) agreed to the proposition, and after involvement from the elders of their families, they finally married.

In the year 610 AD, the Prophet received his first revelation from the Angel Jabraʾīl (Gabriel) in the cave of Hirāʾ inside *Jabal an-Nūr* (Mountain of Light), which was to propagate the contents of the Holy Qurʾān.

When the Prophet came home and recounted the event to Lady Khadījah, she immediately believed him, as she knew his character well. At that moment, Lady Khadījah became the first female to accept Islam, and Imām ʿAlī (ʿa), who lived with them at the time, became the first male to accept Islam. The start of the Prophet's mission provided Lady Khadījah with the opportunity to serve Allah to the fullest. Although she was a very wealthy woman, she spent all of her money helping the Prophet's mission. When the enemies of Islam would imprison Muslims and torture Muslim slaves, she would use her money to purchase and free them, saving them from a life of torture and destitution.

Even during the mass boycott of Muslims in Mecca which caused a lot of poverty and hunger, Lady Khadījah spent the remainder of her wealth trying to help and sustain Muslims in need. Her generosity eventually ended up depleting her of her wealth and health. Due to the nature of the boycott, she ate many simple foods, like weeds and whatever would grow in the barren desert, to the point that she became weak as a result. After eating something poisonous, she eventually became very ill and passed away in the year 620 AD.

Lady Khadījah's (ʿa) death caused the Prophet so much heartbreak that he proclaimed the time of her death the year of sorrow. Lady Khadījah not only provided the many means that helped the foundation of Islam, but she also gave birth to the Prophet's only daughter, Sayyidah Fāṭimah az-Zahrāʾ (ʿa), who would become the mother of all the Imāms that were to come. Through the material sacrifices that Lady Khadījah made with sincerity and faith, she left behind something even more valuable than her wealth.

She left behind a legacy of achieving the highest level of God consciousness she could reach, and for that alone, her contributions are invaluable and innumerable.

Lady Khadījah spent all of her money helping the Prophet's mission.

From Prisoner to Preacher

Shaykh Mateen Charbonneau's journey to the path of Islam

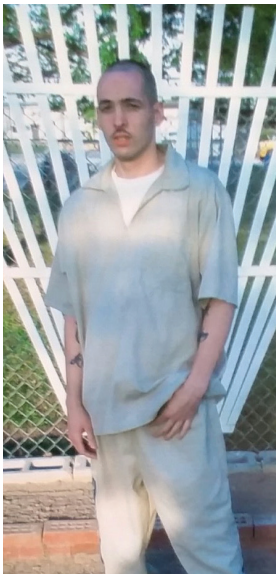
"Asking questions opens the door for you"

Shaykh Mateen Charbonneau was born in 1982 in Sumter, South Carolina. He had a typical childhood until his parents divorced and he moved into the projects with his mother. After this, his life drastically took a turn for the worse. Every day, he would leave his apartment to see gangs hanging out together. Their presence became a source of normalcy for Charbonneau. He started to hang out around them and eventually joined their ranks. However, a few years in, he grew tired of always looking over his shoulder and having to carry a weapon around. He was ready for a change.

"Verily, Allah will not change the (good) condition of a people as long as they do not change their state (of goodness) themselves (by committing sins and by being ungrateful and disobedient to Allah)."

(Noble Qurʾān, 13:11)

Soon after, one of his friends found God and left behind his spiritually devoid life. His friend was the change that Charbonneau was so desperately looking for. He went to visit his friend and told him how inspiring and brave he was for adopting a complete lifestyle change.



Later, Charbonneau was coming home from a football game when his life would be altered forever. He was attacked by a rival gang, and a brawl broke out, resulting in shots being fired. In the aftermath, he was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in a state prison on his 17th birthday for his role in the brawl. Charbonneau felt relieved to be able to escape the life he had, even though it meant being in prison. Once there, he had the time to ask the questions that had been buried deep inside his soul. He looked for answers within different religions because he had always believed in God, but he just needed to find the right religion that could answer all his questions. When he would go through the Bible, he would always find contradictions. Additionally, the Christians wouldn't be able to answer his questions about their book and faith.

It wasn't until he was being processed for his sentence when he met a Muslim man. When it was time for the daily prayers, the man got up to recite the call to prayer, and Charbonneau was amazed. He sat with the man and asked him every single question he had. After receiving satisfactory answers, he announced he wanted to become Muslim then and there. This man, and now friend, had taught him how to pray and learn Sūrah al-Fātiḥah (the opening chapter of the Noble Qurʾān), so that he could immediately start praying once he converted. However, before he was able to profess his faith, the processing period came to an end, and he was sent to prison. When he got to the prison, by the mercy of Allah, there was another man from his hometown who was Muslim, and he helped Charbonneau recite the shahādah. At the ripe age of 17, he became Muslim in 1999.

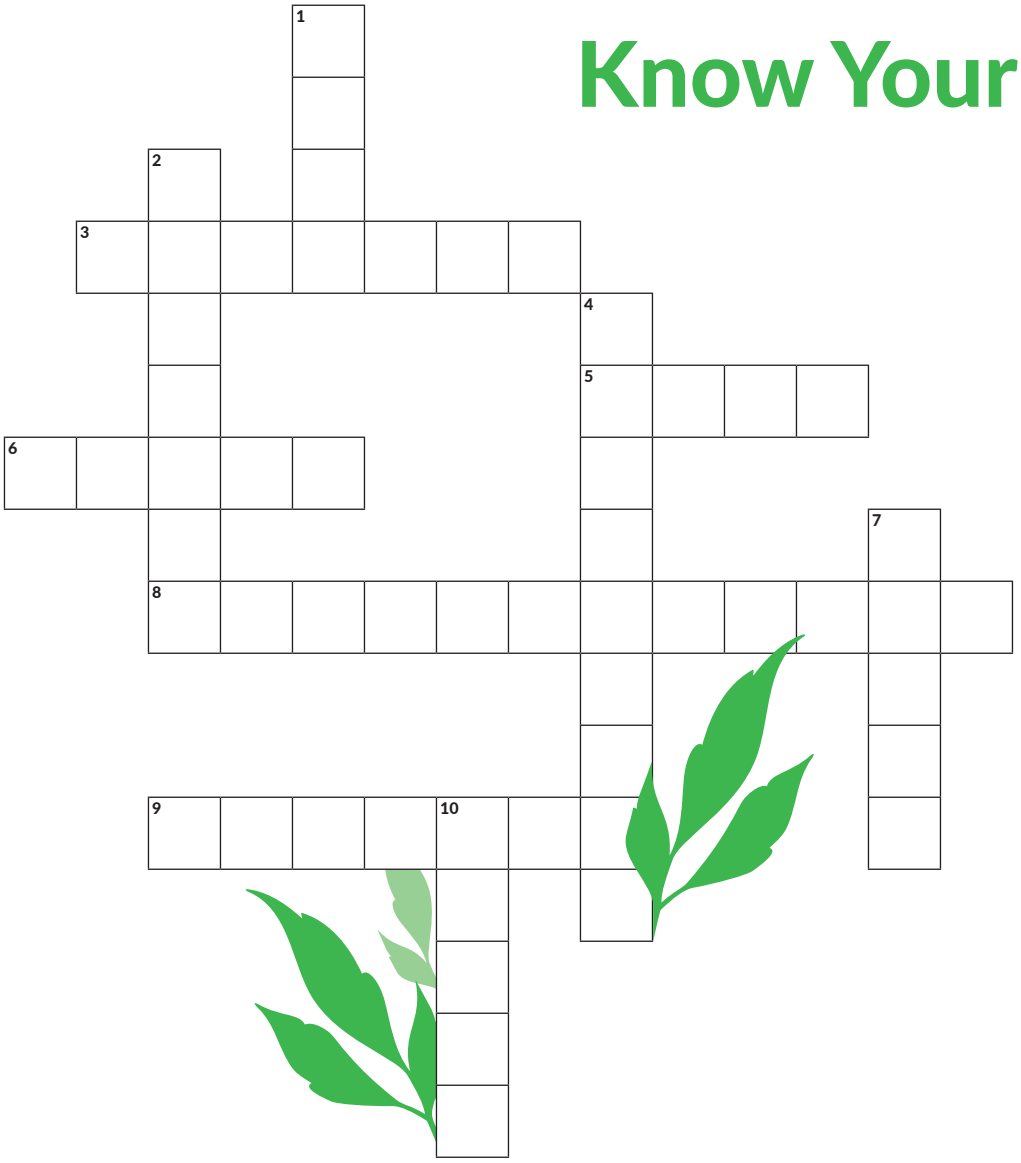
Life Update: Shaykh Mateen Charbonneau has been studying at an Islamic seminary for seven years now. He was crowned with the *ʿamāmah* (turban) by an Āyatullāh in the Holy City of Karbala. He has authored seven books and is the founder of the non-profit organization 2nd Chance, which sends Islamic books to inmates. Within the first five years that 2nd Chance has been established, they have sent 10,000 Shīʿah books, and the program has over 1,000 American Shīʿah converts. He has also filmed a documentary with AhlulbaytTV called "Faith Behind Bars."

Furūʿ ad-Dīn & Uṣūl ad-Dīn

The fundamental beliefs of faith are known as the Uṣūl ad-Dīn, which are five different concepts. They are referred to as the roots, or foundation, of faith. The foundational beliefs help to ground one's faith. The Uṣūl ad-Dīn are Tawḥīd (belief in the oneness of God), ʿAdālah (justice of God), Nabuwwah (belief in the prophets sent to guide mankind), Imāmah (belief in the successorship of the last Prophet), and Qiyāmah (belief in the Day of Judgment).

Growing from those foundational beliefs are obligations and responsibilities, known as the Furūʿ ad-Dīn. The Furūʿ ad-Dīn are the branches of faith, and they grow upon the roots that have been firmly established in the heart of the believer. They are Ṣalāh (completing the daily prayers), Ṣawm (fasting during the month of Ramaḍān), Ḥajj (going to Mecca for pilgrimage), Zakah (giving charity on certain items to needy Muslims), Khums (giving away one-fifth of your savings), Jihād (struggling in the way of Allah), Amr bil Maʿrūf (guiding others to do good), Nahī ʿanil Munkar (repelling others from doing evil), Tawallī (to love and follow the teachings of the fourteen Maʿṣūmīn), and Tabarrī (to stay away from the teachings of the enemies of fourteen Maʿṣūmīn).

Know Your Dīn



DOWN

1. The cave in which the Prophet (ṣ) would worship
2. Name of the angel who brought the Prophethood to Muḥammad (ṣ)
4. Arabic phrase for “Roots of Religion”
7. “A believer to the masjid is like a fish to _____”
10. Whom you should turn to when you face difficulties

ACROSS

3. Another way to say love of the 14 Maʿṣūmīn
5. Arabic word for fasting
6. The theme of this issue
8. The first woman to acccept Islam
9. The first man to accept Islam

Have a Question? Ask an Islamic Scholar!

Please write to us with your questions or comments below. We look forward to hearing from you.

Please address and mail your letter to:

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Transliteration Guide

Arabic terms in this booklet have been transliterated according to the following guidelines:

ء	a, i, or u (initial form)	ظ	ẓ
ء	ʾ (medial or final form)	ع	ʿ
ا	a	غ	gh
ب	b	ف	f
ت	t	ق	q
ث	th	ك	k
ج	j	ل	l
ح	ḥ	م	m
خ	j	ن	n
د	d	ه	h
ذ	dh	و	w
ر	r	ي	y
ز	z	ة	h (without iḍāfah)
س	s	ة	t (with iḍāfah)
ش	sh		
ص	ṣ	ـَـ	a
ض	ḍ	ـِـ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُـ	u

Next Issue...

Ramaḍān,
The Month of Mercy

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Your Questions
Answered

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Historical Figures
Spotlight Continued

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Special Supplications

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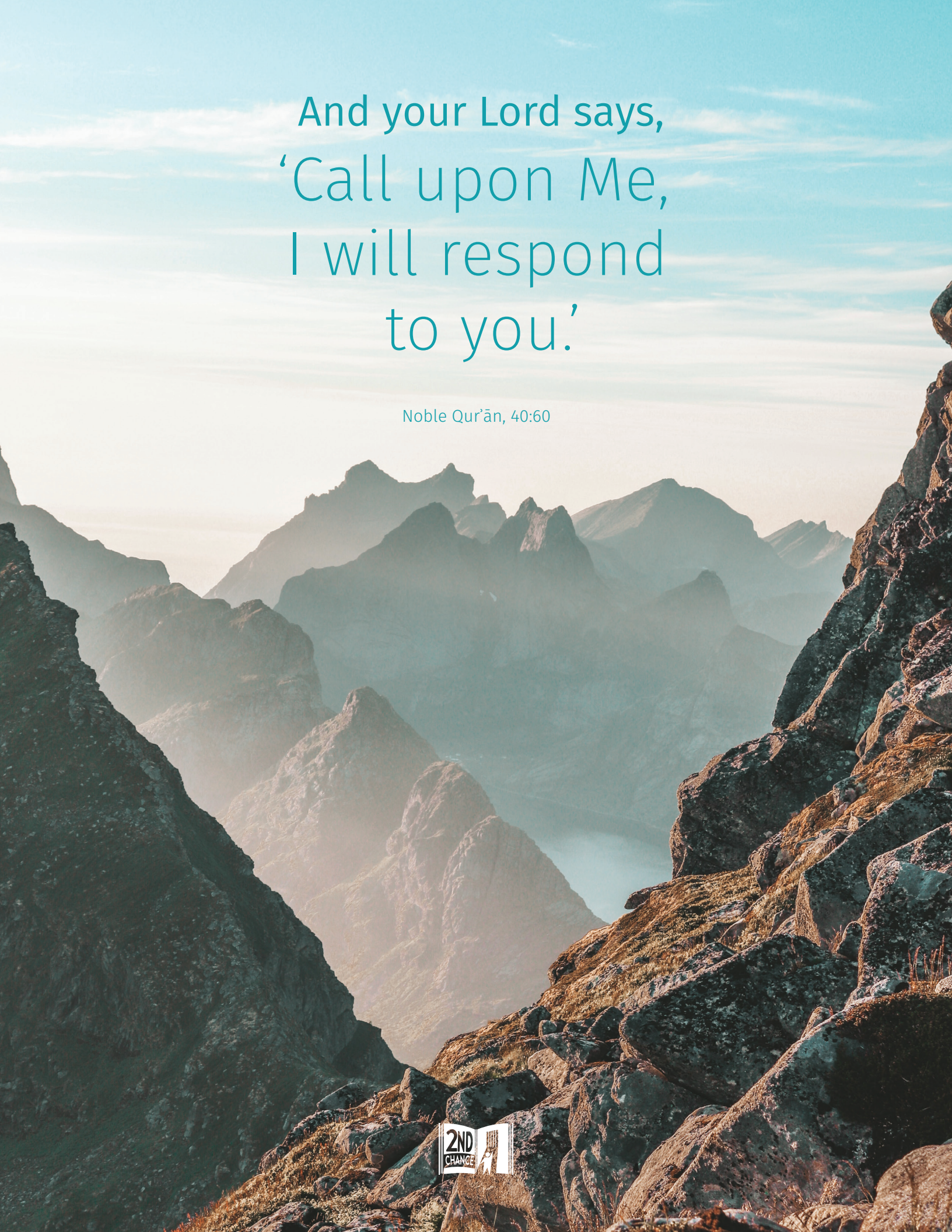
And your Lord says,
‘Call upon Me,
I will respond
to you.’
Noble Qur’ān, 40:60
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